



Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

BULLETIN

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Quarterly Bulletin

No 350

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The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. People of any age and background are welcome as members.

For more information, visit website <http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/>; email info@tasfieldnats.org.au; write to GPO Box 68, Hobart, 7001; or phone our secretary on (03)62278638.

We welcome articles and interesting photos for the Bulletin. If you would like to contribute to the next edition, please email the editor with your article or photos by 15 June.

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Program

General Meetings start at **7.15 pm** for 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month and feature a guest speaker on natural history (no meetings or excursions in January). Meetings are held in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania.

Excursions are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 9.00 am outside the Museum in Macquarie St, Hobart. Bring lunch and all-weather outdoor gear. If you are planning to attend an outing, but have not been to the prior meeting, please confirm the details on the club website as late changes are sometimes made.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Thurs 4 Apr | Guest Speaker: Kevin Bonham , <i>Emerging themes in the study of Tasmanian snails</i> |
| Sat 6 Apr | Excursion: Hartz Mountains National Park. Meet outside the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery on Macquarie Street, Hobart at 9am for car sharing or at the Hartz Mountains National Park car park at 10:30am. Those wishing to help Kevin search for our main quarry for the day (the carnivorous Lake Osborne slug) should bring garden gloves (or similar) + expect wet feet. Helping is not compulsory! Note: The excursion may be changed to Sun 7 April depending on the weather. |
| Thurs 2 May | Guest Speaker: Margaret Brock , <i>Wetlands – life at the edge</i> |
| Sun 5 May | Excursion: TBA |
| Thurs 6 Jun | Guest Speaker: Neil Davidson , <i>Tree decline in the Midlands</i> |
| Sat 8 Jun | Excursion: Bothwell |

For details of talks and excursions beyond this date, please check the website at <http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/>

Subs due now

A reminder that 2013 subs were due on 1 January - please keep your treasurer happy by paying now!

Subs can be paid by cheque to the Club address, by Paypal (follow the links on our website <http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/>) or by EFT to the Club account BSB 067 102 A/c 2800 0476.

Please identify your payment with your name and initial.

Family \$35

Single \$30

Single Junior or Concession \$25

Miena Jewel Beetles – Third Time Lucky

Kevin Bonham

As noted in last April's bulletin, Don Hird has been leading a series of outings to try to find the Miena jewel beetle (*Castiarina insculpta*), since James Wood found a dead one on the 2008 Federation weekend. Our first attempt yielded no jewel beetles at all, while our second produced a different rare jewel beetle (*Castiarina rudis*). The Miena jewel beetle was considered extinct until 2004 and most of the few records since then had been of dead specimens. This year after I compiled all the available records, and found that one of the published dates for one of them was wrong, we decided to try a slightly later date for this year's attempt. The trip on Sunday February 3rd was attended by about 14 Field Nats and we were very pleased to be joined by guest talent Craig Reid from the Queen Victoria Museum.

Despite an iffy weather forecast (which as with last year, improved as the day drew nearer) up on the Plateau it was pleasant, warm and sunny, reaching 17.5 degrees at Liawenee that day. After a stop near the Poatina turnoff (where there were no jewel beetles but a nice range of chrysomelids) we headed up to the junction of Lake Augusta Road, where we had searched last year without finding any jewel beetles.



Eucalyptus beetle (Paropsis Sp.)

Photo: Geoff Carle



Acacia leaf beetle (Calomela maculicollis) .

Photo: Geoff Carle

I'd been looking for only a few minutes on the *Ozothamnus hookeri*, which was surrounded by swarming wasps and beetles, and was just thinking "hmm, just like those soldier beetles only green and yellow" when suddenly, there it was! It was quite incredible to be so quickly handling a live specimen of this mythical beetle which had never been photographed alive before.



Miena jewel beetle (Castiarina insculpta)

Photo: James Wood



Getting the first photographs of a live Miena jewel beetle.

Photo: Genevieve Gates



Miena jewel beetle feeding on Ozothamnus hookeri .

Photo: Geoff Carle

After about fifteen minutes Amanda found a second specimen (so that was another first, two on one day) followed a similar time later by Genevieve finding a third, a small specimen that buried itself deep in the food plant and was very difficult to drag out. Shortly after that, five were found in a few minutes in one patch and we ended up with about twenty.



Photographing Genevieve's find. Photo: Beth Heap



Relaxing on the shore of Lake Augusta. Photo: Beth Heap

We headed out to a site on Lake Augusta Road where the species was much harder to find but Geoff Carle eventually found quite a large one. Craig found another during a brief stop on the plain towards Lake Augusta and I found two more flying at the same site where James had found the dead one five years ago.

An unsuccessful search of the Lake Augusta foreshore (where we did at least catch up with the local alpine cockroach) and a brief stop at the Steppes rounded out a successful day.



Alpine cockroach. Photo: Beth Heap

Three days later Don, Abbey and I were joined by Karen Richards (DPIPWE) and partner Chris Spencer, and Simon Grove and Cathy Young (TMAG) for a further foray, which resulted in several more records of many specimens at sites around Great Lake (even up towards Pine Lake), including establishing that *O. hookeri* is the food plant for the species' larvae too (they emerge as adults from holes in the trunk). A further trip by James Wood resulted in more records and more stunning photos, and finally in late Feb with the food plant getting past its best, Karen and Chris found the species in numbers near Tods Corner. Some of these later trips even turned up something we couldn't find on our excursion – jewel beetles that were not the Miena jewel beetle! (James and I both found *C. virginea* and James found a suspected *C. leai*.)

What is going on here? Is the Miena jewel beetle one of those insects that is very rare or even dormant in many years but sometimes bursts out in massive numbers? Or might it be often quite common, but have been overlooked by looking on the wrong food plant in the past? Searching in upcoming years will answer the question. For the time being we can at least be happy that a species once thought to be gone for good, and then considered endangered and extremely rare, is in fact alive and, for this year at least, thriving.

Woodvine Nature Reserve February 2013

Michael Driessen

Woodvine Nature Reserve was previously a farming property that was donated to the Crown by Mr Herbert Ernest "Ernie" Shaw in 1998 who wanted to protect the plants and animals that lived there. The reserve is important because it supports vegetation communities now extensively cleared in southeastern Tasmania such as *Eucalyptus amygdalina* forest and woodland on sandstone, *Eucalyptus ovata* heathy woodland and *Themeda triandra* lowland grassland. The property also has significant areas of buttongrass.

The majority of the property was burnt during the devastating fire that occurred in early January 2013. Fortunately the historic buildings and associated artifacts were saved from the fire. The field nats visited the reserve to observe first-hand the impact of the fire and what may have survived or colonised so soon after the fire.

Twenty field nats met at 10 am at the old homestead on a warm Saturday morning.



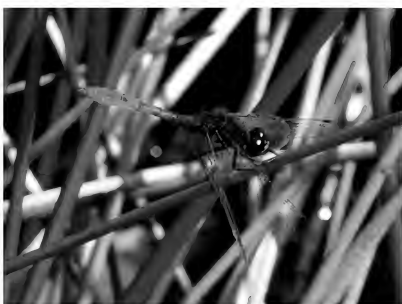
Field Nats ready to explore Woodvine. Photo: Beth Heap

The exotic grassland around the homestead was unburnt and full of wingless grasshoppers (*Phaulacridium vittatum*) and southeastern austroicetes (*Austroicetes vulgaris*). Swamp crickets (*Bobilla* sp.) were calling from moist unburnt vegetation. One of the wingless grasshoppers was covered in bright red mites.



Grasshopper covered in mites. Photo: Geoff Carle

Most field nats made a beeline down the slope through burnt vegetation to a small dam to photograph the dragonflies—eastern pymyfly (*Nannophya dalei*) and eastern swamp emerald (*Procordulia jacksoni*)—and damselflies.



Eastern pymyfly (*Nannophya dalei*). Photo: Kristi Ellingson

A skink, probably a metallic skink (*Niveoscincus metallicus*), was disturbed within the burnt vegetation. Grasshoppers were common in the burnt vegetation and included the species mentioned above as well as the Tasmanian grasshopper (*Tasmaniacris tasmaniensis*) and

the yellow-winged locust (*Gastrimargus musicus*). Wombat burrows were common but did not seem active and no fresh scats were observed.



Checking a wombat burrow for fresh scats.
Photo: Amanda Thomson

A praying mantis (*Tenodera australasiae*) and a Bennetts wallaby was observed.



Praying mantis (*Tenodera australasiae*).
Photo: Abbey Throssell

Bird observations were few; Carol and Elizabeth recorded yellow-throated honeyeater, grey shrike-thrush, forest raven, black cockatoo, kookaburra and, in small patch of unburnt vegetation, several brown thornbills. Blue-winged parrots were regularly heard.



Lunch break. Photo: Beth Heap

David, Genevieve, Beth and Greg, disappeared early in search of remnant wet forest in the hope of finding fungi. We met up again with them at lunch but their search had been largely unsuccessful.

Don and Geoff went in search of some dusky woodswallows and observed about 15 perched on a branch. Kevin found a raspy cricket (*Kinemanina* sp.) under a burnt log. Qug observed a gumleaf hopper (*Goniaea australasiae*).



Leaf hopper. Photo: Kristi Ellingsen

There was a large amount of buttongrass moorland which—typical of buttongrass—had put on a good growth spurt following the fire.



New growth Photo: Beth Heap

We found a very small pond which was full of Tasmanian froglets (*Crinia tasmaniensis*) and Carol found an amazing syrphid fly larva which was identified by Qug as a rat-tailed maggot. This larva has its own built in snorkel to allow it to breath underwater.



At the frog pond. Photo: Michael Driessen



Tasmanian Froglet (*Crinia tasmaniensis*).

Photo: Amanda Thomson



Tasmanian froglet (*Crinia tasmaniensis*). Photo: Beth Heap



Syrphid fly larva Photo: Amanda Thomson



Bird of Paradise Fly (*Callipappus* sp.) females

Photo: Abbey Throssell

On dead *Allocasuarina* were many live true bugs (*Callipappidae*, also known as bird of paradise flies because of feathery tufts on the adult males).

Kevin was excited by a dead snail which Amanda found on top of algae in the pond. It was an undescribed *Elsothera* sp. Overall, not a good day for snails with only three species found. Kristy recorded several beetles including a stag beetle (*Lissotes* sp.), marsh beetle (*Macrohelodes crassus*?), Christmas beetle (*Lamprima aurata*) and a leaf beetle (*Paropsisisterna* sp.).



Marsh Beetles. Photo: Kristi Ellingsen



Christmas Beetle, Golden Stag Beetle (*Lamprima aurata*)
Photo: Abbey Throssell



The old farmhouse. Photo: Genevieve Gates



Old farm machinery. Photo: Beth Heap



Wandering around the old farm buildings.
Photo: Beth Heap

The excursion finished with a wander around the historic buildings.

There was some discussion about visiting the site again in winter when the fungi might be out and to follow the recovery further.

A Launceston summer phenomenon: the great sugar ant versus silver gull dog fight

Simon Fearn

Every summer an amazing spectacle takes place over the hills surrounding Launceston that leaves many people baffled. On hot, calm, overcast evenings threatening rain in late January and February, huge numbers of silver gulls (*Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae*) appear as if by magic and wheel and dive above the hills, particularly on the western fringe of the city. Thousands of birds can be involved and if watched closely they can be seen to fly steadily and then suddenly prop in midair, appear to

grab something in their beak and then head off to repeat the procedure. These impressive displays can continue for hours and only end as night falls. Ever since I was an ant mad young child I have known precisely what this event is all about and have used the appearance of the birds to signal to me an amazing entomological spectacle. The focus of the bird's attention is 30mm, fat and protein rich winged queen alates of the sugar ant *Camponotus consobrinus*. These

familiar orange and black ants prefer well drained, clay based soils, particularly on slopes and so are ubiquitous throughout the Launceston area. They also thrive in completely anthropogenic, urban environments possibly due to high food resources (sugary excretions from lerps, scale insects, aphids as well as leaves and blossom of various tree species) and a complete lack of periodic echidna assaults. Some colonies in urban areas can attain prodigious proportions, persist for decades and contain fantastic numbers of ants that stream in their thousands from the colony entrances on dusk. Swarming in this species only takes place on hot, humid evenings in late summer and is perhaps triggered by falling barometric pressure that indicates rain. Because such conditions are relatively rare in Tasmania's notoriously fickle climate, all the colonies in any given geographical area will swarm on the same evening. This results in possibly millions of winged male and female alates leaving the colonies and flying off to engage in mating flights hundreds of metres off the ground. The males, to the uninitiated, don't even look like sugar ants being small and jet black in colour. The Queens however look like giant winged workers and would be a very tasty

morsel for any predator. When present in such huge numbers, these ants probably represent an important and nutritious easily captured seasonal food source for the birds. A large colony involved in swarming is an impressive sight with hundreds of workers and soldiers excitedly milling about as winged males and queens emerge from the nest and take flight.



Large queen sugar ants (Camponotus consobrinus) emerge from a colony in my Riverside, Launceston garden to take to the air in a nuptial flight. A much smaller, all black male can be seen towards the center of the photograph.

From the President

Greg Heap

Hello fellow Field Nats. I am your new President for the coming year - the first President for some years without a Natural Science background. I come from the world of IT and Accounting.



Our retiring President, Michael Driessen, is very much loved in the club and will be a hard act to follow but fortunately for me, and the club, the rest of the committee are continuing in their current roles. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Michael, on behalf of the club, for his magnificent leadership over the last four years and look forward to Michael's continuing participation in the club. I also want to thank the rest of the committee for their efforts and for once again

volunteering to keep this great club producing more excellent activities.

I would also like to welcome our newest committee member Elizabeth Bicevskis. Elizabeth is well known in the club and recently gave us an excellent Fungi presentation at the December Members Night.

Amanda already has an exciting list of guest speakers and outings lined up for us for the year ahead. Planning for next year's Easter camp will get underway during the year and planning for our hosting of the 2014 Australian Naturalists' Network get-together in October next year will be a major focus.

Keep up the observations and if you get any photos, please email them to me so they can be displayed on the big screen.

Federation of Field Naturalists Get-together

11-13 October 2013

You are all invited to a weekend of interesting activities and field trips at Port Sorell hosted by the Central North Field Naturalists.

RSVP to Robin Garnett, email robin@rubicon.org.au or phone 0438 002 615

Closing date for bookings – Tuesday 1 October

Program Outline

| When | What | Where |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Friday 11 Oct | | |
| 4pm onwards | Arrive at Camp Banksia | Camp Banksia Cnr of Pitcairn and Anderson Sts Port Sorell |
| Evening | BYO barbeque Field Naturalists Quiz – Challenge between Field Nats groups | |
| Saturday 12 Oct | | |
| Morning | Visit Phil Collier and Robin Garnett's conservation property, Rubicon Sanctuary | Rubicon Sanctuary 241 Parkers Ford Rd Port Sorell |
| Afternoon | Visit Hawley Reserve | End of Arthur St Port Sorell |
| Evening | Indian Banquet (\$20 per person) Talk by Phil Collier Threatened plant species in the Port Sorell area | Camp Banksia |
| Sunday 13 Oct | | |
| Morning | Survey <i>Thelymitra antennifera</i> population at Narawntapu National Park | Narawntapu National Park |
| Lunch | BYO picnic at Narawntapu Nat Park | Narawntapu National Park |

Accommodation and home base: Camp Banksia, Corner of Pitcairn and Anderson Streets, Port Sorell

- Bunk room accommodation - \$26 per person per night
- Some limited camping permitted - \$20 per person per night
- Bring your own towels and bedding including pillows
- Beach nearby for walking and swimming

Cooking: in shared small kitchen

- Saucepans, crockery and cutlery provided
- Inside and outside barbeques available
- Inside or outside seating for meals

Meeting room: is across a courtyard from the bunk rooms

- Chairs, tables, heating
- Tea and coffee making facilities

The Central North Field Naturalists look forward to welcoming you to Port Sorell and showing you the some of the rich variety of plants and animals in the area.

RSVP by Tuesday 1 October to

Robin Garnett,

Email: robin@rubicon.org.au or

Phone: 0438 002 615